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INFO RUCNCOM/EC CARICOM COLLECTIVE  
RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE  
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RHMFIS/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL

C O N F I D E N T I A L KINGSTON 000803

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STATE FOR WHA/CAR (RANDALL BUDDEN)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/22/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [ECON](#) [SOCI](#) [ENRG](#) [KCOR](#) [JM](#)

VZ, XL

SUBJECT: JAMAICA: OPPOSITION LEADER HOPES TO WIN AT LEAST 37 OF 60 PARLIAMENTARY SEATS IN IMPENDING NATIONAL ELECTIONS, BUT DECRIMES CHAVEZ'S GROWING INFLUENCE

REF: A. KINGSTON 393 (211315Z MAR 07)

[1](#)B. KINGSTON 705 (111640Z MAY 07)

Classified By: Ambassador Brenda L. Johnson, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

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1.(C) Leader of the Opposition Jamaica Labour Party (JLP)  
Bruce Golding:

-- confidently predicts the JLP will win at least 37 of 60 parliamentary seats in impending national elections;

-- has "now confirmed the arrival" in Jamaica of 4 to 6 million U.S. dollars in cash given by Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez to finance the upcoming election campaign of Prime Minister (PM) Portia Simpson Miller (PSM)'s ruling People's National Party (PNP);

-- decries Chavez's growing influence in Jamaica, and asks "whether the U.S. is merely a spectator, or is going to register serious concerns;"

-- sees no signs of election violence.

End Summary.

Chavez alleged to have given millions to influence impending national elections

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2.(C) At his request, Opposition Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) Leader Bruce Golding met privately with Ambassador (accompanied by PolOff) the afternoon of May 21 in his office at JLP Headquarters. Ambassador began by asking about Golding's recent visit to New York; he said he had held an excellent meeting with former Governor George Pataki two weeks ago, and had discussed at some length the prospects for Jamaica's impending national elections. He had "now confirmed the arrival" in Jamaica of 4 to 6 million U.S. dollars in cash given by Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez to finance the upcoming election campaign of Prime Minister (PM) Portia Simpson Miller (PSM)'s ruling People's National Party (PNP) (Reftel A). JLP supporters had "seen signs of this money at work on the ground." He then said: "at the risk of being blunt, the question is whether the U.S. is merely a spectator, or is going to register serious concerns." The Ambassador reiterated Washington's deep reservations about Chavez's political and economic influence throughout the region, and assured Golding that we had expressed these concerns to the Government of Jamaica (GoJ); however, the U.S. was unable to intervene directly in the electoral processes of other countries.

Petrocaribe and Petrojam

3.(C) Golding then said he had asked Opposition Energy Spokesman (Member of Parliament for St. James West Central) Clive Mullins to "investigate" the deal recently struck by the GoJ to sell 49 percent of Jamaica's national oil company Petrojam to Venezuela for only 63-69 million U.S. dollars. He said the valuation of Petrojam should be determined by the level of investment and shareholding; he understood that the company's valuation recently had been estimated at 300 million U.S. dollars. PNP insiders had "told me it has gotten to the point that whatever Chavez wants, Chavez gets." Golding then maintained that the JLP's "real fear" was that "when we take power, we'll find that the previous Government has made agreements without public discourse."

Meeting with DAS Duddy

4.(C) Golding then said he had appreciated his recent meeting at the State Department with DAS Duddy, whose "disquiet" over growing Venezuelan influence in Jamaica had been "obvious." But the question "as to whether this was a serious issue with the U.S." was another matter. Ambassador said she understood that Golding had been very favorably received in Washington, and also noted that Gov. and Mrs. Pataki were her personal friends.

JLP's Funding Difficulties

5.(C) Golding then noted that, historically, the JLP had relied on corporate donors for 70 percent of the Party's funding; however, the "levels of money needed" had "grown beyond corporate donors' ability." He estimated the election would cost 250 million Jamaican dollars (3.7 million U.S.). Once the elections had been called, the JLP's donors would be "more forthcoming." However, the most recent results from pollster Bill Johnson, published in the Jamaica Gleaner newspaper, purporting that the PNP currently enjoyed a seven-point lead nationally were "not helpful" in raising donations. The JLP was "going after" about nineteen constituencies normally held by the PNP, and money was "key" in swinging the marginal constituencies.

Timing of Elections

6.(C) In response to Ambassador's inquiry about the timing of elections, Golding observed that the "most recent speculation" was that PSM would announce in late June that the elections would be held in July. Ambassador noted that PSM was scheduled to address an ILO meeting on June 12 in Geneva and to meet with Prince Charles on June 13, and also had indicated she would attend the Caribbean 20/20 Conference in Washington June 19-21. Golding noted that PSM might announce elections the last week of June, following her return; alternatively, she might cancel one or more of her commitments. He then said he was unsure whether the latest poll had "buoyed" the PNP, but his PNP contacts had told him they were "worried." The JLP planned to be on the campaign trail "three-to-four days per week over the next six weeks."

Corruption Endemic: Polls Suspect

7.(C) Golding then observed that there were "not many things in Jamaica without a price tag: newspaper stories are for sale." He described corruption as "endemic," and acknowledged its presence within the JLP. Casting cold water on the Bill Johnson poll in the Jamaica Gleaner, he said "if you want a poll, it's for sale."

JLP to win at least 37 of 60 seats

8.(C) In response to Ambassador's inquiry, Golding confirmed that he and PSM had agreed to hold three debates within seven days following nomination day: the first to focus on the leaders themselves, the second on the economy, and a third on social services. He then noted that, as had been the case in the recent budget debates in Parliament (Reftel B) PSM would enjoy the advantage of low expectations, and thus needed only one sound bite to look good; in contrast, "I must perform for 90 minutes." In response to Ambassador's inquiry, Golding said that former PM P.J. Patterson was giving the PNP "tactical advice," but was not out

in the trenches. He then maintained the JLP was "confident of winning 37 seats (of total 60), and possibly as many as 41." He said there were 18 ) 19 seats which were "really difficult for the JLP." He noted that, in the Southwest St. Ann constituency, a traditional PNP stronghold, divisions among contending PNP factions gave the JLP a chance for victory.

No signs of election violence

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9.(C) In response to Ambassador's inquiry as to whether the elections might be marred by the kind of violence Jamaica had experienced in past years, Golding said he saw "little indication of violence;" it had become "politically unacceptable." While there always would be some risk of spontaneous incidents, he detected "no signs of any violence being planned." Ambassador concluded by reiterating U.S. hopes that the two parties would continue to eschew violence, and that the country would benefit from peaceful and clean elections; this would serve the mutual interests of Jamaica and the U.S.  
Johnson